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NIAGARA;

A POEM.

BY A MEMBER OF THE OHIO BAR.

New-York:

PUBLISHED BY EDWARD O. JENKINS,

114 Nassau Street.

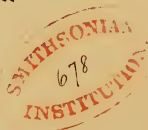
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NIAGARA.

NIAGARA ! upon thy lofty crest
Of plumage white and terrible, the sun
Glances aslant, hanging his quivering beams
In Tyrian glory o'er thee ! I have stood
Beside thee in the mild autumnal eve,
When all the trees to the departing day
Did reverence, girded by him gorgeously—
And watched thy waters, gathered from all springs,
In forest born, where the red Indian roams
With deer-skin clad and feathered moccasin,
Or where the white man's cities pour their smoke
To the far-arching heavens ! Lo, here through thrice
Ten thousand miles of surface variable,
Tributes are brought from the gay crystal fount
That holds its silver cup to catch the dew
On the sky-cleaving mountain ; from the rill
That dances sparkling down the snowy steep ;
From pebbly brooks where the young stripling strays
To build small dams and fairy cataracts,

To image thee the greater ; from the rivers
That sweep majestical through valleys rich
With golden fruitage ; and from broad deep lakes,
Superior, Huron, Erie, Michigan,
The mighty giants of the western world,
Whose shouts make heaven echo, and whose arms
Exerted to their slightest strength toss up
Great ships like childish baubles. From all these
I view the tides collected, thronging pour
In might tumultuous, like unprisoned winds
That make a hollow murmur, and as steeds
Charging to battle shake their snowy manes,
And champ the frothy bit—the swollen floods,
Proud of their wild ungovernable power,
In a vast army stretch to distant shores,
Speeding to win the way ! Yon rock-built isle
Lifting on high its gloomy battlements,
And threat'ning with its host of waving woods,
(Marshalled to Dorian music by the notes
Breathed by the winds o'er Nature's mystic harp,)
On earth's foundations pillared, strives in vain
To fetter them. They mocking leap aside
In two great torrents, each of which hath not
Its likeness, save the other—and sublime
Whirl fiercely 'mid the huge opposing rocks
Toward one great destiny !

Ah, whither rush

The wrathful billows, reckless in their strength ?
 I pause a moment o'er the dizzy verge
 Whence they are plunging. As yet, far below
 I nothing see but the bright glittering sheen
 Of falling waters. Down and down they go,
 Claspings like foes in conflict and embrace,
 A terrible descent of flashing pomp
 That in the nether space repeats itself,
 Till swims the brain with gazing ! while from rocks
 That seem like pebbles in the stream beneath,
 Their broken spray soars up in blinding mists
 Through which twin rainbows loom ! About my feet
 The clouds are forming. On the sands below
 Men dwindle down to Lilliputian size ;
 And yon strong vessel, which with sinewy arms
 And fiery breath flings back the boiling surge,
 Looks a child's plaything, which a boy's small hand
 Might bear upon its palm. 'Tis terrible !
 I dare not gaze here longer, lest my eye
 Reel with its vastness, and amazed I fall
 Amid this " Hell of Waters !"

Now I turn,
 And by a long, precipitous descent,
 Wearied at length attain the level shore
 O'er which the beetling crags frown blackness down ;
 Starred here and there by tufts of vernal moss,
 And pale blue flowers that look, like angels' eyes,

Upon the storms of passion! I behold
The Fall, which late beneath me far I saw,
Now rising far above! With echoing boom
The mass of waters boils beneath my feet,
And for a moment sight is drowned in sound,
So swells the deaf'ning roar. Then I awake,
And standing on a rock from which the drops
Ooze forth like drops of blood from martyrs wrung
In their last torture, tremble at the scene!
Speech, breath is gone—the bosom heaves and
swells

With dumb amazement—a wild frantic joy
Akin to worship seizes on the frame—
The hands clasp all convulsive, and the tears
Start from the streaming eyes—the soul is lost,
Wrapt in its own great wonder! Far above,
With gaze upturned and shaded orbs, I view
Niagara's nodding crest among the clouds,
Bathed in eternal sunbeams! Right before
A wall of waters shimmering up to heaven,
Of liquid emerald, with pearl inlaid,
Rises in wondrous beauty ; changeable
With its own convolutions, like great snakes
With green and golden scales involved in fight—
Snakes huge as Ophiucus' when it spreads
O'er half the heavens the grandeur of its coil.
Now bright, now dark, now glittering, now obscure,

The mighty waves fall thundering in th' abyss,
 Which, veiled in clouds of spray, seems fathomless ;
 The spray itself uprises to the skies,
 Dimming their light in mists such as at morn
 Float circling from the ocean—or like smoke
 From some huge conflagration ! All about
 Is full of vastness, power, infinity.

And as the waves come leaping in their joy,
 Deep calleth unto deep, like heaven's great bass,
 With anthems and with praises. Lo, they sing,
 "Glory to God most High ! Glory to Him
 Who framed the massive pillars of the earth,
 And built the dome of space, and set the stars,
 And lambent moon, and all-beholding sun
 In its broad chambers ! Glory unto Him
 Whose hand upheaved the mountains, and whose
 touch

Scooped the wide valleys and the ocean's bed,
 And sent the streams meandering through the earth,
 'Mid pleasant meadows decked with odorous flowers,
 And through green forests where the mavis sings,
 And the deer gambols, and the panther blinks,
 Sunning his spotted skin and painted claws !
 Aye, glory to the great Invisible—
 Th' Omnipotent, All-Wise, Eternal One,
 Who was, and is, and shall be evermore
 Unchangeable ! The stars may wax and wane—

The earth become a wandering orb of fire—
 Our strength may cease, and our wild sport of waves
 Turn to a barren desert ; but Him, age
 Of century on century up-piled,
 Making creation hoar and desolate,
 Can never touch with weakness. Still sublime
 He stands as proudly 'mid the wreck of worlds
 As at their birth. To Him the latest end
 Is but as the beginning. Let all floods,
 And mountains, groves, and caves, and eddying
 winds
 Praise Him alone—and let proud vaunting man,
 Who hath more cause for gratitude than all,
 Take up the anthem, till the utmost shores
 Shall echo to the skies the name of God !”

Such is thy voice to me, oh mighty stream,
 And such the awful measure thou hast sung
 Since the first birth of Time. The Indian boy
 Hath watched thee tumbling down two hundred feet,
 And clasped his hands, and blindly murmured,
 “ God !”

The sage hath viewed thee, and with tremulous
 voice,
 Uttered, “ ’Twas God who dug thy channels deep,
 And fed them from a thousand streams and lakes !”
 And the weak woman, bowing like a flower
 The wind hath shaken, raised her tender eyes,

And in deep rapture whispered, “ ’Twas my God ! ”
 The atheist, bold in other presence, here
 Feels the dread truth come crowding o’er his brain,
 And owns a Deity ! “ ’Twas God,” he cries,
 “ Who crowned thee here the Queen of Cataracts,
 With clouds by day and glittering stars by night ;
 Built thy pavilion in the soft blue air,
 Reared thy broad throne of adamantine rock ;
 Robed thee with terror—veiled thee in the mist,
 And sandalled thee with sunbeams ! Lo, thou
 walk’st

In glory on the rainbow, and its seal
 Gems thy bright forehead, and constrains thy
 strength,

Reminding thee that ’gainst his word who said,
 ‘ The waters shall no more destroy the earth,’
 E’en thou art impotent. Go on—go on,
 And from thy mighty depths still thunder, God ! ”

The spirit of thy song, Niagara,
 Descends upon me—my full soul is riven
 With terror and with beauty. Through my brain
 The universe of all created things
 Pours down the stream of thought. I faint—I sink
 ’Neath the impetuous torrent. Help, O God !
 Help me, a finite creature, to sustain
 Thine Infinite glory !

Now I breathe more calm,

As in a Presence of subduing power,
And whilst I list, the beating of my heart
Grows audible. And now a still small voice
Of wonderful and solemn melody
Breathes in my soul this teaching: "Thus," it says—
"Thus thou, frail man, with myriad tribes of men,
Like smallest drops in Ocean, art now borne
Down Time's resistless current, toward the abyss
That yawns for all. Each morning thou art nearer,
Each evening sunset tells thee thou hast passed
A portion of the space dividing thee
From thy fore-ordered doom. Death spareth none—
The mighty monarchs of the Infant world,
The heroes and the sages, where are they?
Gone--gone forever! Not a vestige left
Of all their greatness, to whose potent names
The world did homage, trembling as they passed!
Still is he King of Terrors--down his tide
Go age and prattling childhood--thither too
The strong, and beautiful, and gifted tend,
As captives chained of old to chariot wheels
Went toward the Eternal City! Never yet
Had victor such a triumph. Even now
When life appears most joyous, and its waves
Take up a brisker dance, thou may'st approach
The dreadful cataract. No power averts,
No prayers postpone thine advent. Then so live,

That when in the last fearful mortal hour,
Thy wave, borne on at unexpected speed,
O'erhangs the yawning chasm, soon to fall,
Thou start not back affrighted, like a youth
That wakes from sleep to find his feeble bark
Suspended o'er Niagara, and with shrieks
And unavailing cries alarms the air,
Tossing his hands in frenzied fear a moment,
Then borne away forever! but with gaze
Calm and serene look through the eddyng mists,
On faith's unclouded bow, and take thy plunge
As one whose Father's arms are stretched beneath,
Who falls into the bosom of his God!

Niagara Falls, 1848.



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